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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

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Subject: "Eggs Around the World." Approved by Bureau of Home Economics, U.S.D.A.

--ooOoo--

A friend of mine living in Shanghai has sent me a brightly painted picture of Chang, the Chinese kitchen god.

"The kitchen is his abode," writes my friend. "A large part of the doings of the household take place there, so that is a fitting place for him to be. One of the chief duties of the kitchen god is to report to the Upper god what takes place in the home, so the Upper god may know whether to bless or punish. On the 23rd of the twelfth month, Chang ascends to heaven and makes his report. On that night every home worships him with honey, candy, fruits, vegetables, and so forth. After they worship him, they put his picture on a horse made of grass or bamboo, or in a paper sedan chair, and burn both picture and horse, or chair. But before they set fire to Chang's picture, they put some honey on his mouth, so he will report good things about them to the Upper god in the third heaven. Then they buy a new god from the shop, and he reigns in the kitchen for the next year."

Well, I have hung my picture of Chang in my own kitchen, in a Chinese lacquer-red frame. I hope he will approve of my cooking. Just the other day, though, when I was frying eggs for breakfast, I thought I saw a smile in his Oriental eyes. "Eggs!" he seemed to say. "What do you know about eggs? Could you, with your uncultured Western taste, appreciate such a delicacy as a hundred-year-old egg?"

No -- I'm afraid I couldn't -- not if I knew it was a hundred years old. Of course, I didn't say anything like that out loud, for I don't want to offend my kitchen god. After all, he's a stranger in a strange land, and perhaps he feels a little out of place, never to see anyone using chopsticks, or drinking tea out of little cups without handles.

But to get back to the subject of eggs. Every time I look at Chang I'm reminded of a certain delicious Chinese omelet I had once upon a time. Egg Foo Yeung, it is called. I have the recipe. Almost every nation has its own typical way of using eggs. Not often do we copy foreign recipes at home, but we might well do so, for most of the other countries use egg dishes which are highly nourishing and economical.

My Chinese omelet, for example -- Egg Foo Yeung. An omelet with bean sprouts or mixed vegetables, and a little shredded cold chicken, served with a thickened soybean sauce. In many places, you can buy canned bean sprouts. They're always on sale in markets patronized by Chinese. Or possible you sprout your own. Here's my recipe for Egg Foo Yeung, or Chinese omelet: Six eggs, well-beaten; one can of bean sprouts or mixed vegetables, well-drained; one-half cup of cold chicken or other meat, shredded; one-half cup of onion, shredded. Mix all the ingredients and put by half-cupfuls into a skillet in which a little cooking oil has been heated. Cook in cake form. Fry until brown on one side, then turn and



brown on the other. Serve with a sauce made by thickening soybean sauce with cornstarch.

In Italy, as you would expect, they serve eggs cooked with spaghetti and tomatoes. Eggs Milanaise, an excellent dish for a meatless day, are hard-cooked eggs, sliced, and spread over the top of the spaghetti and tomatoes. The Italians like their green leafy vegetables, too, so they prepare a dish of Eggs Florentine, in other words, poached eggs on a bed of spinach, with grated cheese on top of the eggs, lightly browned in the oven. Another good Italian dish is a mold of spinach, eggs, and cream sauce, known as stampa di spinaci. (I hope my Italian friends won't criticize my pronunciation.)

The history of modern cookery really begins with the Renaissance, with Italy as the starting point. Catherine de' Medici brought Italian cooks to Paris, and they introduced a "cultured simplicity" which was unknown in France before. And, as everybody knows, France eventually became famous for its egg dishes. French omelets and French egg dishes are too numerous to mention in a short talk, so I'll mention only a few, like French pancakes (crepes Suzette), made with a rich batter of eggs and milk, baked almost wafer thin on the griddle. When the pancake is nicely browned, it is spread with jelly, rolled, and dusted with powdered sugar.

The typical French omelet is a plain flat omelet, and it is used in France as a sort of pocket for almost any other kind of food. An omelette aux fines herbes (fine-cut herbs of several kinds) is something to write home about! So is an omelette aux fraises (with strawberries) served as a dessert; and an omelette aux pommes (with apples).

Now, to Spain. It's an old Spanish custom to serve an omelette with tomatoes, green peppers, and onions.

Many Swedish egg dishes are made as a custard. The Swedish cooks put chopped meat, flaked fish, or chopped vegetables in a baking dish, pour a custard over them, set the dish in a pan of warm water, and bake in a moderate oven.

Poached eggs a la Portugaise are served on molds of rice which has been steamed in tomato sauce. Over them is poured cheese sauce.

Our Mexican neighbors serve fried eggs with a sauce made of tomatoes, onions, green peppers, and parsley. In Nova Scotia they make another excellent food combination with poached eggs on codfish cakes, with tomato sauce.

When it comes to salad dressings and sauces made with eggs, we find we owe one of our favorites to the Russians -- a mayonnaise to which is added chopped green pepper, chili sauce, chopped chives, and a hard-cooked egg, chopped. There you have Russian dressing.

Well, well -- this story of eggs has taken us almost around the world, and it has given me the wanderlust. To paraphrase F. P. Adams--

"I'd like to be a tourist,  
And with the tourists stand;  
A ticket in my pocket,  
A passport in my hand."

